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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Crackdown on Somaliland Media

REF: DJIBOUTI 921

Summary

¶11. (SBU) The already-browbeaten media in Somaliland this week suffered two serious setbacks, both apparently orchestrated by the Somaliland government in an effort to temper reporting about ongoing inter-clan conflicts. Two reporters from independent Radio Horyaal were arrested on July 13 and remain in custody. On July 14, Horn Cable Television (HCTV) was ordered to suspend broadcasting, with a court appearance scheduled for July 18. Post remains vigorously engaged with the Somaliland government to register our concern. We will also issue a press release and are seeking opportunities, to the extent media conditions allow, to conduct interviews with Somaliland media on this matter. End Summary.

Ongoing Inter-clan
Conflict

¶12. (SBU) Over the past several months, Somaliland has endured renewed inter-clan conflict, reportedly centering on land disputes. President Riyale's Gadubiarsi clan is involved in the most recent clashes, in opposition with the Isaak/Jibril Abukar clan. On July 10, President Riyale and Jibril Abukar clan elders met to discuss a late May Guurti (House of elders) resolution on the protracted resource-based conflict; the Guurti ruled in favor of the Isaaq. Riyale has reportedly been hesitant to endorse the resolution.

¶13. (SBU) On July 12, at least four passengers on a bus en route to Hargeisa were gunned down by rival clan militiamen (reftel). The passengers who were killed were reportedly from President Riyale's subclan.

¶14. (SBU) While blame for the current round of violence cannot be definitively related to the Somaliland elections currently scheduled for September, we note that grounds for postponing elections include insecurity in any part of Somaliland. Contacts speculate that this conflict could be used to postpone the elections, which have already been put off four times.

¶15. (SBU) Separately, on July 15, President Riyale fired two of his ministers: Nur Amin Ismail, Minister in the office of the president and Osman Kasim Qodah, Minister of Trade. Amin told us the firing of ministers is linked with the Gabley clan conflict. Amin said

that while both he and Riyale are committed to resolving the conflict, they differed on the approach.

Radio Horyaal
Arrests

¶6. (SBU) On July 13, Somaliland police and officers from Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested two journalists from independent Radio Horyaal, which is owned and operated by Kulmiye, the leading opposition political party. Police officers reportedly raided Radio Horyaal's Hargeisa offices and arrested Director Mohamed Osman Mire and news editor Ahmed Saleban Dhuhul. The journalists are still being held at the CID headquarters in Hargeisa. Multiple sources in Somaliland told us the arrest is linked to a president Riyale's meeting with Jibril Abukar elders and Horyaal's reports on the July 11 bus attack. Horyaal reported Riyale's meeting with the Jibril Abukar elders had ended in a stalemate and the elders had reportedly stormed out of the meeting.

¶7. (SBU) Somaliland maintains a ban on independent radio stations, though Horyaal has dodged the ban by basing the station outside Somaliland, reportedly in Europe. Against this backdrop, a Riyale-chaired meeting of a government committee on the conflict reportedly resolved to take measures against some Somaliland media and Horyaal was at the top on that list for its role in covering the conflict. Ismail Hureh, a former Transitional Federal Government (TFG) minister and MP, told us the journalists were arrested simply for reporting clan conflicts and issues surrounding the land dispute. A Somaliland journalists union and all Somaliland media

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practitioners condemned the arrest and continued detention of the two journalists.

HCTV Suspension

¶8. (SBU) Horn Cable Television (HCTV) was also threatened with suspension on July 14. A contact at HCTV tells us the CID asked the regional court to issue a warrant against HCTV after the attorney general requested a ban on HCTV. However, the Chairman of Hargeisa regional court rejected the request, noting that there is no legal means by which to suspend the station. HCTV managers told us they have a court date early on July 18, but are broadcasting in the meantime. In a July 16, press statement, Mohamed Abdi, news editor and acting director of HCTV, lamented the fact that the Somaliland administration was working on what he called a clandestine scheme to gag or completely shut down independent media in violation of the constitutional provisions for a free media.

Somaliland Government
Alleges "Propaganda"

¶9. (SBU) Post has engaged the Somaliland government to register our concern about these apparent violations of freedom of the press. In a July 16 phone call, Ahmed Dahir, the Somaliland Minister of Information, told us the Horyaal arrests were made because the station had no license to operate. When we pressed him about the timing of the arrests, he admitted a relation to the recent events, claiming that both Horyaal and HCTV were guilty of spreading "propaganda." He claimed there are three or four other stations operating in Somaliland without trouble.

Post Actions

¶10. (SBU) Post will issue a press release condemning these events and calling for the release of the Horyaal journalists. We are also seeking opportunities to conduct interviews with Somaliland stations, both in relation to our concerns about the upcoming

elections and the media arrests/suspension. We will also raise this matter with President Riyale at the earliest opportunity.

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